



## Relationship Scams – Don't Let Fraud Break Your Heart!

Relationship fraud happens when scammers create fake romantic or collaborative relationships, often online, to trick victims into sending money or personal information. These frauds often spike around Valentine's Day when emotions run high. According to the FBI's [IC3 2024 report](#), there were 17,910 complaints and \$672,009,052 in losses linked to confidence/ romance frauds in 2024. The FBI also notes that many of the cases involving cryptocurrency losses were linked to these frauds.

**Lesson:** If your conversations are steered to off-platform messaging, "investment opportunities," or unusual requests stop, verify, and report if necessary. Networking on social media platforms such as LinkedIn, ResearchGate, and conference channels is important for professional growth; however, it can also increase your exposure to relationship fraud.

### Higher-Ed Reality Check: Why Faculty & Staff Are Targets:

- **Public profiles:** Posting CVs, conference bios, personal websites, and LinkedIn make reconnaissance easy for the fraudster.
- **Data persistence:** Legacy records and alumni directories remain accessible and can be misused years later.
- **Professional trust signals:** The use of titles, publications, and affiliations assist fraudsters in crafting believable academic personas.

### Red Flags to Watch for:

- **Too Perfect, Too Fast:** They shift rapidly from professional discussion to personal conversation, flattery, or emotional bonding.
- **Sob Stories:** Claim grant delays, visa issues, or being stranded while "traveling for a conference" and ask for financial help.
- **Requests for Access:** Request help accessing journals, your login, lab data, internal documents, or conference registration systems.
- **Avoiding Verification:** They refuse to meet via video or in person, avoid using their supposed institutional email, or can't provide verifiable affiliations.

### Protect Yourself:

- **Verify Before You Trust:** before trusting relationship or research-collab appeals (search name + "scam") and check the institutional directory.
- **Question Unusual Requests:** Never send money or share logins, unpublished works, private university information, or student information.
- **Report Suspicious Activity:** Contact IT Security or Campus Fraud Hotline.

### Where can I find more information?

[USF Regulation 5.001](#): Fraud Prevention and Financial Detection

USF Office of Internal Audit website: <https://www.usf.edu/audit/>

### How can I report potential fraud or abuse?

Notify your supervisor

Contact the USF Office of Internal Audit at (813) 974-2705

Report activities anonymously through the [EthicsPoint](#) hotline at (866) 974-8411